

How Others Serve

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Abroad, civilian service ranges from diplomacy to firefighting

COMPULSORY MILITARY SERVICE, WITH ALTERNATIVES

ISRAEL

Secular Jews are drafted at age 18--males for three years, females for two--so military service is a rite of passage. Orthodox Jews, Muslims and Christians (a quarter of Israel's citizens) are exempt, but a majority of Israelis, including most Arabs, support expanding national civilian or military service for everyone.

GERMANY

Half of the 180,000 men drafted each year opt out in favor of noncombat military work, civilian service or foreign development. Hospitals and charities that rely on conscripts defeated a government proposal in 2004 to end the draft. Volunteering abroad is increasingly popular; Austria and Denmark also offer this option.

TAIWAN

Males over 18 must serve two years, but substitutions for combat include policing, firefighting and environmental work. The Diplomatic Alternative Service Program sends Taiwanese men to work in medicine, agriculture and technology in countries like Chad and Macedonia. The government considers them goodwill ambassadors.

NONMILITARY COMPULSORY SERVICE PROGRAMS

MALAYSIA

Using an annual lottery, the government selects 85,000 recent high school grads for a three-month camp with military-style physical training and community service. Each group has 60% ethnic Malays, 28% Chinese, 10% Indians and 2% others--a mirror of Malaysia's makeup--to promote patriotism and racial harmony.

NIGERIA

The National Youth Service Corps, a one-year commitment for college grads under 30, fosters economic development, ethnic tolerance and educational equality by sending young people to work outside their home states. Without the program, many areas would lack teachers, engineers, doctors, pharmacists and accountants.

SOUTH AFRICA

Before being certified to practice, junior-level doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, occupational and speech therapists, clinical psychologists and dietitians must spend a year working in poor areas. The country is considering expanding the requirement to lawyers and other professionals, as Mexico does.

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